**Emails to Politicians:**

**Authentic Purpose and Authentic Audience**

**College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing:**

* W.CCR.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
* W.CCR.4 - Write clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
* W.CCR.5 - Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
* W.CCR.6 - Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

**Goals:** To summarize research findings on environmental problems in a call to action to policy makers, an authentic audience. To learn how to craft an email in a style appropriate to the audience.

**Frontloading by classroom teacher:** Students will have completed their research reports. Alan will have directed the students to consider an action they would like the Senators to take. Alan will also have told the students why Senators are an appropriate audience.

**Steps in the process:**

with guidance from [“Write an email to a politician”](http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youthcentral.vic.gov.au%2FDo-it-Yourself%2BDemocracy%2FGetting%2Bthrough%2Bto%2Bgovernment%2FWrite%2Ban%2Bemail%2Bto%2Ba%2Bpolitician%2F%23.UmfOQ3BzHTo&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNHLFTuTJovZcTrIiWDR084rsjCjEQ) and [“Corresponding with Members of Congress”](http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2097). Students have a worksheet.

1. Consider why an email would be appropriate for selected audience
2. Write a subject line
3. Draft an email
4. Add email to a Google.doc on Drive (one document per class)
5. Address criteria for editing
6. Students peer edit work using comment function
7. Following this class period, high schoolers do final editing
8. Document is returned for students to submit email to politician

**How to Write an Email to an Elected Official** (background information for teachers from PTA website)

Emails are an effective form of communication when advocating a Congressional office. Due to the heightened security measures on Capitol Hill, a letter can take between two and four weeks to reach a Congressional office. However, if you email that same letter, the office will receive it immediately. Emailing a member of Congress is an especially easy and concise way to communicate with their office. Some emails can be as short as a single paragraph urging your member of Congress to vote a certain way or to advocate for a certain issue. Because they will only see your message on a computer screen and not in physical form like they would a faxed letter, make sure the important information contained in your e-mail jumps out at them. You can do this by putting what action you are requesting they take in the subject line (ex: YES on H.R. 3). By doing this, even if the member or his/her staff does not take the time to you read your letter in its entirety, they will still have received the message that one of their constituents feels a certain way about an issue.

It is generally not the members themselves that open and read constituent mail, but their legislative aides. These legislative aides receive hundreds of e-mails, phone calls, and letters everyday regarding a wide array of policies, so it is important that your email be as concise as possible in order to be effective. It is also helpful to use your own words. While it might be easier to add your name to a form letter, they also tend to be less effective in attracting the member’s attention to your issue.

Include the following components in the message portion. First, identify yourself and explain why you are writing. Then, provide more detail on the issue about which you are writing. If you are concerned about a certain bill, make sure to include the specific bill number (ex: H.R. 1 or S. 1). When you write a letter, include relevant research, local data, and relevant personal stories that will effectively persuade your member of Congress to see your side of the issue. Finally, state what action you would like your member of Congress to take. Close by saying thank you.

The following is from Light, John. “Do Politicians Read the Emails You Send Them?” *Moyers & Company.* Web. 23 Oct. 2013.

“Sending an email is totally fine. Just do your best to make sure the email doesn’t read or sound like a form letter,” Englin [Shayna Englin, political advocacy and communications consultant] says. “And make sure you say you’re a constituent. If I was going to write a letter to my congressman, I would include some detail about my neighborhood. … If you’re writing in because you care about tax rates — why? What does it mean for your family, what does it mean for your business?”

But Englin says, rather than sending an email, the best way to make sure a politician gets your message is still to call up his or her office local office — or even better, go there in person — and tell a staffer why an issue is important to you.

Increasingly, social media is also becoming a way for constituents to communicate directly with politicians...Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) was an early adopter and is still an active Tweeter — in 2009, *Time* named her [one of the top ten celebrity Tweeters](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1878865_1878867_1878873,00.html) “because she actually reveals herself in her posts.”

**Link for emails to Senators Blunt and McCaskill:** <http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm?State=MO>

**Extensions to the lesson:**

* Write a Twitter post--a lesson in summarizing
* Role play a phone conversation to a Senator’s office
* Invite a staffer to speak to the class (our own Rachel Schober worked in Obama’s Illinois office and has much to say about correspondence)

**Questions to consider in debriefing:**

* Were the students able to adequately summarize their research in an email?
* Are there other potential audiences for the students’ research?
* What are your experiences with authentic audience?
* What are your experiences with peer editing?

**How to Write an Email to an Elected Official**

Things to Remember:

* Always be polite and courteous.
* Be as concise as possible.
* Include the action you are requesting in the subject line.
* Include your home or work address, even in emails.
* Thank the member of Congress for taking the time to read your email.

Include the following things in the message portion. First, identify yourself and explain why you are writing. Then, provide more detail on the issue about which you are writing. If you are concerned about a certain bill, make sure to include the specific bill number. Include research, local data, and relevant personal stories that will effectively persuade your member of Congress to see your side of the issue. Finally, state what action you would like your member of Congress to take. Close by saying thank you.

Prefix: \*

First Name: \*

Last Name: \*

Email: \*

Address: \*

Address:

City: \*

State: \*

Zip Code: \*

Home Phone:

Work Phone:

Topics of Interest: \*

Subject: \*

Message: